

THOMAS CREEK RESTORATION PROJECT RANGE REPORT

SCALE OF ANALYSIS

The Thomas Creek Restoration Project is entirely located within the North End Sheep Allotment (See Appendix C). For the purpose of discussing livestock grazing, the entire North End Sheep Allotment will be discussed.

Methodology and Assumptions

The Umatilla National Forest Plan Goal for range is to “Manage the forage resources for an upward vegetative trend in areas in less than “fair” condition and an upward or stable trend for areas in “fair” or better condition, while providing for forage productivity and making suitable range available for livestock grazing.” (Umatilla LRMP 4-63).

The Resource Summary in the Umatilla LRMP states that most of the projected forage production increases in the next 30 years will be a result of transitory range created by timber harvest (Umatilla LRMP 4-32).

Mitigation measures to be included in the proposed action are described in Appendix A and for the purpose of this analysis will be assumed that they are met.

Environmental consequences of this project on livestock grazing will be discussed in relation to how each alternative affects forage quantity for livestock grazing as well as accessibility for livestock.

Existing Condition

The North End Sheep Allotment is approximately 52,000 acres in size and up to 2,000 ewe/lambs are authorized to graze the allotment between June 1st and October 9th each year. The current Allotment Management Plan was signed in 2012 and implemented the North End Sheep Allotment Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement signed on August 24th, 2011.

The North End Sheep Allotment is divided into the Phillips Creek, Middle Ridge, and Spout Springs pastures. Each pasture is divided into subpastures. Sheep are routed through the allotment with herders in two separate bands of sheep at the subpasture scale. The routing schedule is determined annually based on the annual conditions of the allotment, resource issues, public use, and the previous year’s routing schedule.

Upland conditions were assessed on the North End Sheep Allotment in the Record of Decision and FEIS for the North End Sheep Allotment in 2011 (North End ROD, 2011). Multiple long term monitoring methods were used to assess the condition of plant communities on the allotment. This assessment determined that upland habitat types were in a stable trend and in a satisfactory condition defined by the Forest Plan. This assessment was primarily based on open rangeland vegetation. Future forest management activities (thinning and prescribed fire) was identified as an activity that could increase transitory range, improve livestock distribution, and improve livestock accessibility to available forage.

Sheep are not allowed within 300 feet of streams with ESA listed fish species within the North End Allotment. Due to this management requirement, sheep grazing has limited effects to riparian plant communities on the allotment. The proposed activities within the Thomas Creek

Restoration Project within RHCA's will not affect grazing activities due to this management requirement.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Effects Common to Alternative A—No Action

Direct, and Indirect effects:

The proposed activities would not occur under the No Action Alternative. There would be no direct or indirect effects of the alternative to range activities.

Sheep grazing would continue to occur within the analysis area with current stocking levels and management techniques. There would be no transitory range created due to harvest or burning activities.

Livestock grazing distribution on the uplands would stay the same or continue to decrease as stocking in timber stands grows denser and wood continues to accumulate on the ground. Livestock access would stay the same or continue to decrease due to down wood, continuous small regeneration, and visibility. Forage would also stay the same or continue to decrease due to the reduction of sunlight on the forest floor reducing forest floor vegetation.

Cumulative effects:

Livestock distribution and forage available for utilization would remain consistent with existing management. Potential improvements in livestock distribution from the creation of transitory range would not occur. Loss of forage due to canopy closure in some stands could potentially cause a need to reduce stocking rates in the future.

Areas where burning would have occurred in the action alternatives would remain untreated for the foreseeable future. The potential for uncontrolled wildfire may increase in the absence of controlled burning. This could lead to reductions in livestock grazing if destructive wildfire occurred on a large scale.

Effects Common to All Action Alternatives

Direct and Indirect effects:

All action alternatives (Alternatives B, C, D, and E) would increase livestock distribution on the allotment by increasing access and/or increasing available forage for livestock. This would spread utilization of vegetation more evenly through the allotments and reduce soil and vegetation disturbance in areas of concentrated use. These effects would be observed in the short term (3-5 years) and long term (5-15 years). There would be no change in authorized livestock numbers or season due to an increase in forage or accessibility to forage.

Proposed burning could reduce the amount of forage in a one to two year period, however, the in the long term forage would be expected to be higher than the existing condition due to the reduction in competition from small trees and/or shrubs. If burning occurred during the grazing

season, sheep management may have to be modified to ensure that sheep are not within proposed burning units.

Proposed noncommercial thinning, commercial thinning, fuels reduction projects, and harvest could increase the amount of sunlight on the forest floor, stimulating grass growth and increasing the amount of available forage (transitory range) for domestic livestock (see Table 2). These treatments would decrease stand densities, which currently limit access and visibility for both livestock and livestock managers in portions of the analysis area. Management of livestock would improve with all action alternatives due to increased visibility and access for livestock herding.

These effects to range resources would be proportionate to acres treated between alternatives. The difference between alternatives is relatively small since the acres treated between alternatives do not vary significantly. Alternative E proposes the most acres to be treated, followed by Alternative C, Alternative B, and Alternative D (see Table 2 below). Prescribed fire will improve forage conditions on 1350 acres in the Middle Ridge Pasture and 232 acres within the Phillips Creek Pasture.

The improvement in forage and accessibility will affect routing schedules on the North End Sheep Allotment. The annual routing schedules will be modified to utilize the treatment units and improve the distribution of the sheep throughout the grazing season. Overall utilization levels should be lower due to the increase in transitory range. The benefits will primarily be found within the upland forest habitat types.

The activities in all action alternatives are consistent with the Umatilla Land and Resource Management Plan for Range.

Cumulative effects:

A return to active management and reintroduction of prescribed fire would allow for a return to more historic conditions that would carry forward in time. The proposed treatments in all action alternatives could permit more frequent and widespread use of prescribed fire in the future. This could result in long term improvements in forage and accessibility for livestock.

Table 1. Thomas Creek proposed treatments by alternative.

Alternative	Total Acres Considered	Commercial	Non-Commercial	Monitoring only
B	2546	1270	1276	0
C	2800	1330	1270	200
D	2417	949	1468	0
E	3068	1793	1276	0

Table 2. Existing pastures in the Thomas Creek Restoration Project area and the percent of those pastures affected by proposed treatments.

Pasture	Total Acres in Pasture	% Treated Alt B	% Treated Alt C	% Treated Alt D	% Treated Alt E
Phillips Creek	21,178	10% (2,177Acres)	11% (2,429 acres)	9% (2,048 acres)	12% (2628 acres)
Middle Ridge	14,982	2% (369 Acres)	2% (371 acres)	2% (369 acres)	3% (440 acres)
Spouts Springs	18,520	0%	0%	0%	0%

BRAD LATHROP
Range Management Specialist

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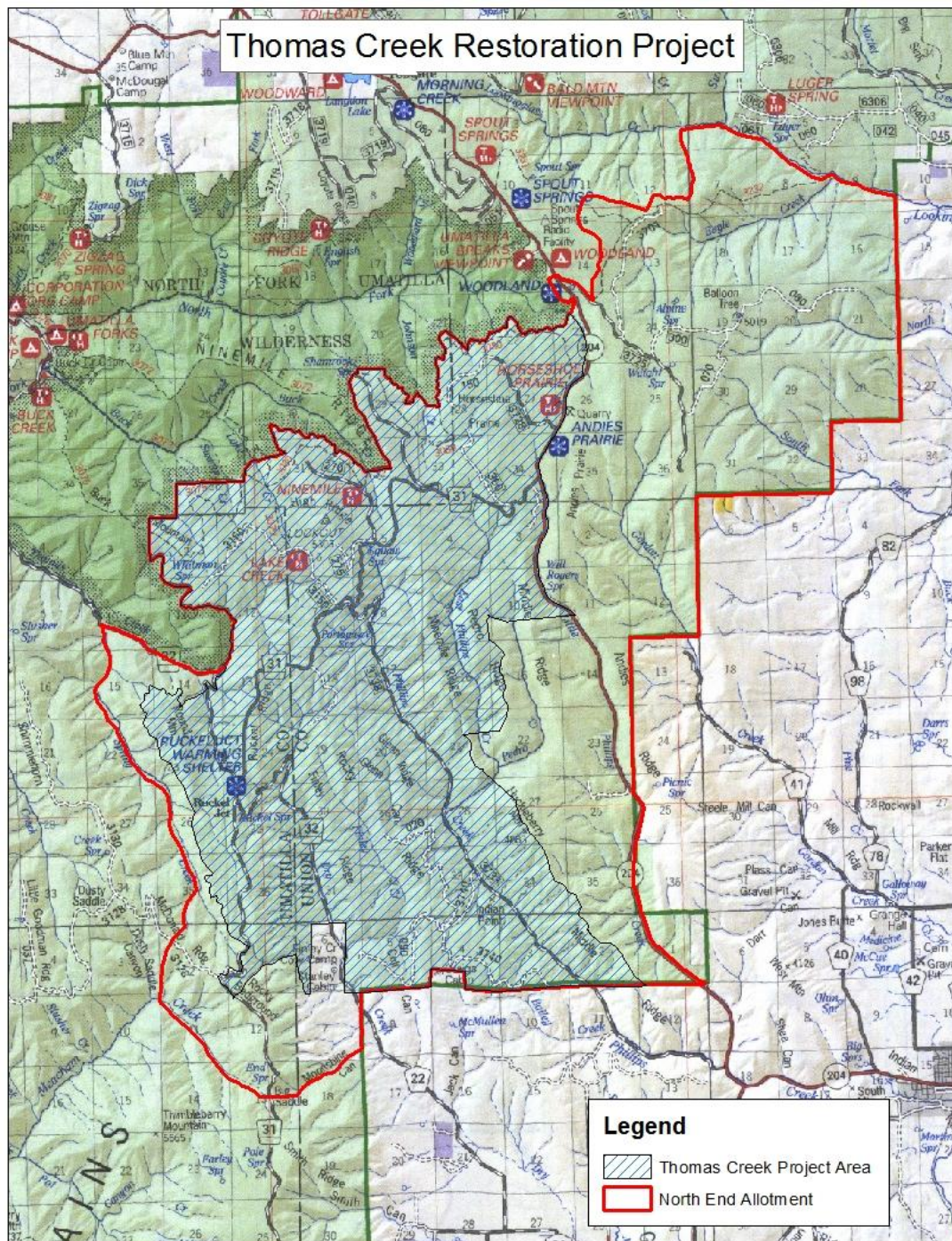
Appendix A: Mitigation Measures

1. All existing structural range improvements (fences, gates, ponds, and spring developments etc.) will be contractually protected.
2. Project managers will coordinate with the Range Manager and the permittee to develop an annual routing schedule to route sheep around the proposed project activities.
3. The Range Manager and permittee shall be notified of the schedule for prescribed fire to ensure that the herder has sufficient time to move sheep out of the area and to plan the next years routing schedule.
4. The prescribed fire units will be evaluated after implementation to determine the appropriate time of when sheep can return grazing the area.

Appendix B: Comparison of Alternatives Table

Activity	Alternative			
	B	C	D	E
<i>Silvicultural Treatments (Acres)</i>				
Clearcut	25	25	25	25
Seedtree	97	84	82	97
Group Shelterwood	240	240	240	240
Shelterwood	65	65	45	65
Variable Density- Regen	306	289	279	306
Variable Density	181	168	165	181
Riparian Restoration	28	0	0	28
<i>Total acres of historic Ponderosa Pine Plantation treated*</i>	942	870	836	942
Intermediate- commercial	328	322	114	850
Intermediate- NCT	238	238	431	238
NCT	1037	1032	1037	1037
Edge – Hardwood	0	72	0	0
Edge + Hardwood	0	65	0	0
No Edge – Hardwood**	0	77	0	0
No Edge + Hardwood**	0	62	0	0
No Go (control)**	0	62	0	0
<i>Vegetation Treatments in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA's)***</i>				
Class 1 (non-commercial)	172	172	134	172
Class 3 (commercial)	28	5	0	28
Class 3 (non-commercial)	101	100	102	101
Class 4 (commercial)	155	145	0	155
Class 4 (non-commercial)	234	233	370	234
<i>Transportation and Access- All Alternatives</i>				
Miles of newly constructed temporary roads	1	1	0	1
Miles of temporary roads constructed on existing template	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
Miles of closed roads re-opened for haul	14	14	11	14

Appendix C: Thomas Creek Restoration Project Map



References

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region; Land and Resource Management Plan for the Umatilla National Forest (FEIS), 1990.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region; Walla Walla Ranger District Range Monitoring Data..

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region; Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement for the North End Sheep Allotment. August 2011.

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